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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

REPORT NO. [REDACTED]

## INFORMATION REPORT

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This document is hereby regraded to  
CONFIDENTIAL in accordance with the  
letter of 16 October 1978 from the  
Director of Central Intelligence to the  
Archivist of the United States.

This report is a translation from the original Vietnamese of extracts (pp 59-64) of the official publication "Lich Cuu Quoc" (1947 Almanac) of the Ho Chi Minh government.\* While it is not a secret document, its circulation has necessarily been somewhat limited and to our knowledge has not heretofore appeared in English. While the publication dates from 1947, the fact that it still represents the current organizational scheme of the Viet Nam Army has been confirmed by various sources. The translation has been made as literal as possible in order to preserve the form of the original text. In many cases the Vietnamese denominations of units and ranks have been included, as English equivalents are only approximate at best. Press reports have often used very loose English or French equivalents, with resulting confusion.

## ORGANIZATION OF THE VIETNAM ARMY

## I. General Principles.

1. The creation and development of the Army is based on the following considerations: activation and deployment of military units, and the availability and use of weapons, equipment, and transportation from one region to another, etc.

2. The development of the Army must evolve in such a way as to permit ready and rapid utilization of the means at hand, and at the same time to assure a strong chain of command. For example, while we are still faced with an insufficiency of motor vehicles and heavy artillery, we must use whatever means are available to render our troops mobile enough to offer effective resistance to the enemy who is more highly motorized. But when our country is sufficiently consolidated, we shall provide motorized troops, and the organizational pattern will necessarily involve some differences.

3. Our Army is at present organized on the "principle of threes." The types of unit are as follows:\*\*

## A. Section (Tieu-doi), consisting of 12 men, as follows:\*\*\*

Section leader	1 man
Assistant leader	1 "
Machine gunner	1 "

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(Section A continued)

Assistant machine gunners	3 men
Ammunition carriers	3 "
Scouts	2 "
Grenade thrower	1 man
Total	<u>12 men</u>

B. Platoon (Trung-doi), consisting of 42 men, as follows:

3 combat sections (Tieu-doi), 3 x 12	36 men
Platoon leader	1 man
Assistant platoon leader	1 "
Political instructor	1 "
Observer	1 "
Messenger	1 "
Grenade thrower	1 "
Total	<u>42 men</u>

C. Company (Dai-doi), 178 men, as follows:

3 combat platoons (Trung-doi), 3 x 42	126 men
Headquarters and Hq. Detachment consisting of:	
(1) Command and staff	
(2) Supply	)
(3) Medical	)
Total	<u>178 men</u>

D. Battalion (Tieu-doan), 676 men, as follows:

3 Companies (Dai-doi), 3 x 178	534 men
Battalion Hq. and Hq. Det. consisting of:	
(1) Command and staff	
(2) Medical	)
(3) Supply	)
One platoon of engineers (Trung-doi Cong-binh)	
Total	<u>676 men</u>

E. Regiment (Trung-doan), 2289 men, as follows:

3 battalions (Tieu-doan), 3 x 676	2028
Regimental Hq. and Hq. Det. consisting of:	
(1) Command and staff	
(2) Supply	)
(3) Medical	)
One platoon of engineers (Trung-doi Cong-binh)	
Total	<u>2289</u>

F. Brigade (Dai-doan), 7115 men, as follows:

3 Regiments (Trung-doan), 3 x 2289	6867
Brigade Hq. and Hq. Det. consisting of:	
(1) Command Section	
(2) Administrative Section	
(3) Planning and operations sec.	
(4) Political section	
(5) Supply section	
(6) Courts martial section	
(7) Communications and transport section	
(8) Engineers section	
(9) Medical supply section	
A reserve company (Dai-doi Ve-binh) to be maintained in readiness at the disposition of the Brigade Commander to reinforce any unit which has been temporarily weakened	<u>178</u>
Total	<u>7115</u>

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G. Larger units - division, army, etc. (Su-doan, Lien-doan, and Tap-doan). Depending on the terrain and the requirements of military strategy, each Su-doan will consist of 2 or 3 Brigades (Dai-doan), and will have attached the necessary Tank and Aviation forces. Each Lien-doan consists of 2 or 3 Su-doan; each Tap-doan consists of 2 or 3 Lien-doan.

II. Grades and Ranks.

4. In accordance with the Decree of Ho Chi Minh, President of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, signed 20 March 1946, the grades and ranks of the Vietnam Army are as follows:

- A. Private (Binh). Two grades: Ordinary Private (Binh-nhi), and Private First-Class (Binh-nhat).
- B. Non-commissioned officers (Sy). Three grades: Lance Corporal (Ha-sy); Corporal (Trung-sy); Sergeant (Thuong-sy). "Aspirant" (Chuan-uy).
- C. Company grade officers (Uy). Three ranks: Second Lieutenant (Thieu-uy); First Lieutenant (Trung-uy); Captain (Dai-uy).
- D. Field grade officers (Ta). Three ranks: Major (Thieu-ta); Lieutenant Colonel (Trung-ta); Colonel (Dai-ta).
- E. General officers (Tuong). Three ranks: Major General (Thieu-tuong); Lieutenant General (Trung-tuong); General (Dai-tuong).

5. Promotions of Privates and Privates First-Class (Binh) will be accomplished by command of the Commander of the Regiment (Trung-doan); promotions of Non-Commissioned Officers (Sy) by the Brigade (Dai-doan) Commander; promotions of Company Grade Officers (Uy) by the High Command of the Army; promotions of Field Grade Officers (Ta) by the Minister of National Defense; and promotions of General Officers (Tuong) by the Prime Minister.

6. Leadership and command of the various units is as follows:

- A. Section (Tieudoi) Leader: Corporal (Trung-sy)  
Assistant Section Leader: Lance Corporal (Ha-sy)
- B. Platoon (Trungdoi) Leader: Second Lieutenant (Thieu-uy) or "Aspirant" (Chuan-uy)  
Assistant Platoon Leader: "Aspirant" (Chuan-uy) or Sergeant (Thuong-sy)
- C. Company (Daidoi) Commander: Captain (Dai-uy)  
Assistant Company Commander: First Lieutenant (Trung-uy)
- D. Battalion (Tieu-doan) Commander: Major (Thieu-ta)  
Assistant Battalion Commander: Captain (Dai-uy)
- E. Regiment (Trung-doan) Commander: Lieutenant Colonel (Trung-ta)  
Assistant Regimental Commander: Major (Thieu-ta)
- F. Brigade (Dai-doan) Commander: Colonel (Dai-ta)  
Assistant Brigade Commander: Lieut. Colonel (Trung-ta)
- G. Division (Su-doan) Commander: Major General (Thieu-tuong)  
Assistant Division Commander: Colonel (Dai-ta)
- H. Lien-doan Commander: Lieut. General (Trung-tuong)  
Assistant Lien-doan Commander: Major General (Thieu-tuong)

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I. Tap-doan Commander: General (Dai-tuong)  
Assistant Tap-doan Commander: Lieut. General (Trung-tuong)

7. Promotions are based on the character and capacity of the officer or soldier concerned. A Non-commissioned officer (Sy), in order to be promoted to Company Grade Officer (Uy), must pass an examination of a sort provided by the Minister of National Defense. A soldier or officer must ordinarily remain in grade for the following minimum periods before receiving a promotion to the next higher grade:

From Private or Pfc (Binh) to Lance Corporal (Ha-sy): 6 months

From Lance Corporal to Corporal (Trung-sy): 1 year

From Corporal to Sergeant (Thuong-sy): (lacking in text)

From Sergeant to "Aspirant" (Chuan-uy): 1 year

From "Aspirant" to Second Lieutenant (Thieu-uy): 6 months

From Second Lieutenant to First Lieutenant (Trung-uy): 2 years

From First Lieutenant to Captain (Dai-uy): 2 years

From Captain to Major (Thieu-ta): 2 years

From Major to Lt. Colonel (Trung-ta): 2 years

From Lt. Colonel to Colonel (Dai-ta): 2 years

From Colonel to Major General (Thieu-tuong): 3 years

From Major General to Lieutenant General (Trung-tuong): 3 years

From Lt. General to General (Dai-tuong): 3 years

8. But in special cases, where soldiers or officers have displayed unusual merit, exceptions to the above rules may be made. In any case, after 6 years service in grade, a soldier or officer is automatically promoted to the next higher grade. The promotion from Private to Private First Class is the reward of devotion and capacity on the part of the soldier, and may take place at any time without any fixed minimum of service; the position of Private First Class is not a position carrying any command function.

### III. Authority and Command.

#### A. Command function.

9. Except in unusual cases (when there are special orders to the contrary, or in the circumstances defined in Article 3, Decree #37), ordinarily when the Commanding Officer of a unit is absent because of an accident or for other reasons, the command over that unit passes to the officer who has the next highest rank; in case there are two officers with the same rank, then the command passes to that one who has been in grade the longer time.

10. In case two such officers have been in grade for exactly the same length of time, then command passes to the one who has served the longer time in the army.

11. In the case of a detachment in which there are neither officers nor non-commissioned officers for the time being, the authority over the detachment will be assumed by the soldier who is the bravest and most resourceful.

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12. When two or more units are temporarily consolidated for a special mission, command will be assumed by the officer holding the highest rank; if there be two or more such officers, then the one who has been longest in grade will assume command.

B. Political Commissars (Chinh-tri-vien) in the various headquarters.\*\*\*\*

13. The British, American, and French Armies have no Political Commissars attached. Only the Chinese and Russian Armies have them. At every level, the Political Commissar attached to a given unit is charged with the responsibility of assisting the commander of that unit and of discussing all matters with him, but without participating directly in the function of command and without assuming responsibility for purely military matters. In all questions concerning political matters, the Commanding Officer must accept the opinion of the Political Commissar.

14. In matters of supply, culture, and discipline, it is the duty of the Political Commissar to enlighten the Army and the civilian population, in order that the commands from higher levels may be executed, the morale of the Army may be heightened, and a spirit of cooperation between the Army and the civilian population may be instilled.

15. In case the Commander of a given unit is absent, the Assistant Commander will assume command of the unit, and the Political Commissar will help the Assistant Commander to execute the decisions made. In case both the Commander and the Assistant Commander of a given unit are absent, the Political Commissar may designate an individual to assume command of that unit temporarily; or in case of necessity the Political Commissar himself may assume command, but without assuming personal responsibility for that unit in purely military matters.

C. Powers and Limitations of Attached Technical Personnel.

16. Military personnel attached to the technical services (such as Radio, Music, Arsenals, and Military Factories) is given military rank, and may receive promotions as high as the rank of colonel (Dai-ta).

17. Engineer officers may have any rank from First Lieutenant (Trung-uy) to Lieutenant General (Trung-tuong). The same is true of Medical Officers. Persons acting as liaison officers from the VN Army to foreign military units may be given temporary rank in the VN Army, valid only for the duration of the liaison mission.

18. The Commanding Officer of a given unit has no power to interfere in the work of technical personnel attached to that unit. If a unit commander observes that any members of such Technical Staff are not performing their duties properly, he may complain to a higher Committee consisting of both Military and Technical officers. The latter Committee will then investigate the case and take appropriate action. In case of emergency, the Commanding Officer of the unit may temporarily suspend the activities of technical personnel attached to that unit, but in that case must immediately notify the higher Committee.

#### IV. Exploits of the Vietnam Army

19. Even before the Vietnam Army was named "Army of National Defense," that Army existed under other names, and had already distinguished itself with glorious exploits. In the first period, the Vietnam Army was composed of "little nests" (Tieu-to) of guerrillas, hiding in the jungle, and using "hit and run" tactics against the French and the Japanese. In the country there were "Self-Defense Units" (Tu-ve), training themselves in secret and protecting the secret organization of the Viet Minh. Even under the greatest difficulties, these Tieu-to and Tu-ve distinguished themselves for their

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exploits. The guerrillas of Bac-Son (Tonkin) defended themselves against the French for 8 months. The Tu-ve of the (Tonkin) Delta distributed pamphlets, hoisted flags, and took the necessary steps to protect the Can-Bo and the (Viet Minh) organization.

20. During the period of the great Revolutionary Tide (1945), guerrilla bands in combat zones took the name of "Liberation Army of Vietnam," and fought gloriously against the Japanese in battles at Thai-Nguyen, Tuyen-Quang, and Yen-Bay (all in Tonkin). In the Delta, the Tu-ve advanced even more, and organized many Tieu-to of guerrillas, which destroyed Japanese rice supplies, killed Vietnamese traitors, and boldly spread propaganda.

21. During the period of the Uprising (Aug.-Sept. 1945), the Vietnam Liberation Army seized the camps and towns occupied by the Japanese. The Tu-ve and guerrilla forces united with the forces of the people to seize power.

22. In the early days, the Vietnam Liberation Army took the name of "Army of National Welfare" (Cuu-quoc-quan). When the Provisional Government was officially established, the Army took the name of "Army of National Defense."

23. Before the General Insurrection, the whole army was under the command of the Viet Minh Front. Since the establishment of the Government, the Viet Minh Front placed this army under the command of the Government of National Coalition. Today the command of the Army is in the hands of the Ministry of National Defense and of the Military High Command (Quan-uy-hoi).

(a) The Ministry of National Defense is responsible for the organization and administration of the Army. For example, the Ministry of National Defense is in charge of recruiting, the manufacture of arms, the pay of officers and soldiers, and matters of supply.

(b) The Military High Command is responsible for the movements of the Army, and for its combat Strategy.

#### V. Conclusion

24. The Army of National Defense was born from the struggle led by the Viet Minh against the Japanese. This Army was forged on the field of battle. Because of its past experiences, we are sure that the future of the Army will be glorious.

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**Comment.** The principle of Threes: Each unit consists of three units or the next lower level.

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**Comment.** It is not clear whether reference is made to machine guns or sub-machine guns. The Vietnamese word is "Sung-may" (literally machine gun). Previous reports have indicated the VN Army's large reliance on small arms, and the paucity of machine guns - which suggests that reference is made to SMG's or even to rifles. In this case, the "Assistant Machine Gunners" might or might not be separately armed with individual SMG's or rifles - presumably depending on the availability of weapons. The most probable explanation is that the word "Sung-may" is flexibly used, and may in some cases mean machine guns, in other SMG's, etc.

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**Comment.** Chinh-tri-vien may be translated "Political Agents," Political Commissioners, or in various other ways. However, since the text frankly draws attention to the parallel of Political Commissars in the Russian Army, we have

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thought it clearest to use the term most familiar in connection with that army. From the text, it appears to us that the parallel with the Russian Army in this respect is a very close one. In practice, in the VN Army, the Political Commissar is a Can-Bo designated by the Communist Party. Within the unit to which he is attached, he is all-powerful, being in the position of having authority without equivalent responsibility. For the Army as a whole, the Chief Political Commissar is Tran-Huy-Lieu. The Chief Political Commissar for the VN Army in Siam is Hong. It will be noted that the last (third) paragraph of this section (15) appears to be in partial conflict with the first two paragraphs of III A (9 and 10). In previous reports similar instances of vagueness or contradiction have been noted in official VN Government texts, particularly when it is a question of reserving extraordinary powers for persons who (behind the scenes) will inevitably be designated by the Communist Party, outside the official channels.

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